

## DNR Migratory Gamebird Committee Meeting November 1, 2016

### Attendance:

Jason Fleener (WDNR), Taylor Finger (WDNR), Pete Engman (WDNR - NOD), Jim Holzward (WDNR- NED), Bill Hirt (WDNR- WCD), Tyler Strelow (WDNR - LE), Paul Samerdyke (WDNR - SOD), Brenda Kelly (WDNR), Peter David (GLIFWC), Kurt Waterstradt (USFWS), Don Kirby (WI Waterfowl Association), Brian Glenzinski (Ducks Unlimited) John Wetzel (WI Wildlife Federation), Jeff Nass (Hunters Rights Coalition), Al Shook (WI Conservation Congress),

Invited Guest: Dr. Jacob Straub (UW – Stevens Point)

### **Introduction of Dr. Jacob Straub**

- Jason Fleener introduced Dr. Straub to the committee as the new UW – Stevens Point Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Professor. Went around the room and introduced everyone in the committee to Dr. Straub.
- Dr. Jacob Straub provided a brief summary of who he is and his background and also provided information on a new wood duck productivity research project (similar to Ron Gatti's work) that is upcoming, with a pilot season set for 2017 at the Mead Wildlife Area, followed by 2 full years in 2018 and 2019.

### **Update on Wisconsin Waterfowl Plan**

- Jason Fleener provided a brief history of the Wisconsin plan and the goal to have the updated plan completed and ready to send out for review by May 2017.
- The major workload is still focusing on the Human Dimension aspect of the plan which has in recent years become an integral part of how we manage waterfowl.
- The Joint Venture is planning to have a meeting in Ann Arbor, MI in early February to discuss the updated waterfowl plan.
- In the updated Wisconsin waterfowl plan there has been a change in focal species, Black ducks were removed as a focal species for WI and was replaced by Ring-necked duck while the other 3 focal species remain the same (Mallard, Wood duck and Blue-winged teal).
- Within the plan there may be a change in how we manage habitat and instead of focusing on the number of acreage we manage for habitat quality and maintenance.

### **Update on Wisconsin Plan**

- Jason Fleener informed the group that the Wisconsin Plan has not been updated since 1992 when Jim March wrote it and although the information is still relevant, the time is right to make some updates.
- In the past the department has submitted funding request to the Joint Venture to update the plan but due to other projects going on has been turned down.
- The Joint Venture has Flex Fund Grants for research and monitoring so the hope is to again apply for a grant and hire a post doc to come in and update the plan.
- There was discussion on whether or not the new Wisconsin Plan was going to emphasize grassland and whether or not it would focus on productivity or if migratory habitat would be incorporated.

#### **Comments –**

- **Brian Glenzinski** – There is still some discussion that needs to take place to decide on if we want to conduct any in state research to assess and evaluate the quality of our current WPA and Wildlife Areas as well as NAWCA projects to identify if current techniques are working or areas we consider high priority are actually important for productivity of waterfowl.
- **John Wetzel** – Is there going to be any significant changes to the plan and the response was that with the use of new technology we will likely improve and add to the old plan rather than completely alter it.

#### **Discussion on Duck Stamp Funding and Application Process**

- Jason Fleener informed the group that he is serving on a habitat team through the department's core work analysis and the responsibilities of that team are to look for ways to improve efficiencies. With regards to duck stamps he asked the group about ways we could improve the efficiency for the stamp project process, the application process and how we allocate funds to these projects.
- The duck stamp project cycle occurs every 2 years and in this meeting we were looking for recommendations to take back to the habitat team on how or if we need to improve our current process.
- Jason Fleener asked the group if they like the qualitative review process that is currently used (High, Medium and Low) or would they prefer a more quantitative process that uses a numerical ranking criteria.
- Jason Fleener asked the group if the review process for projects was too labor intensive or if it took too long.
- Jason Fleener asked the group if they would prefer an allotment of duck stamp dollars by district rather than ranking projects and funding them as we currently do.

#### **Comments –**

- **Jim Holzward** – Regarding the qualitative vs. quantitative process for ranking projects, pheasant stamp projects have a number value assigned to the ranking system which he prefers.

- **Pete Engman** – Regarding the process of ranking on efficiencies, he thinks that more time for discussion is important and that we shouldn't try to speed it up. Instead we should work on how we structure our application to help find efficiencies.
- **Brenda Kelly** – The review process for project applications does take a lot of time but feels that it is important to take all the time that is necessary. Personally feels that site visits are a good idea and feels that a lot of project applications are impacted by the author's ability to write. It should be based on the quality of the project not necessarily on how well the author's writing ability is and that falls back on the reviewer's knowledge and review of the project.
- **Brian Glenzinski** – Feels that a model where a region representative ranks the quality of projects in their region and then brings those rankings to the table based on his/hers regional knowledge will help and create a smoother ranking process rather than have people outside the regions try and guess the value of the project without all the appropriate knowledge.
- **Group Discussion** – Generally not in favor of having money allotted to each district. Feels that each district is different and managing wetlands should be on a project by project basis. Group recommends not going to district allocation.
- **Jason Fleener** – Asks group if they thought that model where Area Supervisors would rank projects and bring them to a committee and then the committee ranks and moves forward would work?
  - o **Pete Engman** – Would still like more time to discuss projects, possibly have meetings were previous projects have taken place so we can see how well the project has turned out.
- **Pete Engman** – Part of the problem is that we currently don't have a great idea of what the priorities of the duck stamp dollars are and without that knowledge it is difficult to assess project value.
- **Brian Glenzinski** – Feels we should tighten or better identify our guidelines in applications so we can narrow down the projects that fulfill our needs.
- **John Wetzel** – Suggest that a brief review on projects funded in the past and their success would be helpful to the group. Possibly a district report with photos.
- **Brenda Kelly** – Would like to have a tracking system designed so we can identify projects that have been in the past funded and how that relates to current funding allotment.
- **Tyler Strelow** – Suggest requiring the author of project proposals be responsible for providing an update, perhaps have a section "Past history on this site funded by duck stamp dollars".
- **Peter David** – Having each district provide a project update report would be helpful.
- **Jeff Nass** – It would be beneficial not only to the committee, but to our constituents to provide more report/project updates so people realize the benefits of the duck stamp habitat program.
- **Don Kirby** – We should have the ability to send project applications back to regions and have area supervisors provide some background information ("cliff notes") on each project to help the reviewers have a better understanding of the value of each project. Feels like that extra information would be helpful when ranking each project.
- **Group** – Suggest having the authors send application to local representative on the committee at the same time they send in the application to Jason and Eddie. That way they have it immediately and have more time to review the project.
- **Group** – Suggest having a more elaborative reporting process back to the committee for projects that have been funded in the past.

- **Jason Fleener** – Asks group if they would entertain a 2 day meeting with the possibility of a site visit and group consensus was if it warrants two days then it should be considered if the work load doesn't require 2 days then no.
- **Al Shook** – Concern over duck stamp license sales due to Go Wild and the inability to purchase multiple stamps.

### **Update on Waterfowl Season and Numbers**

- Taylor Finger provided update on feedback he had received on how the season has been going
  - o North – Plenty of water, been difficult hunting over water but success in fields and the season has been pretty steady with new birds starting to push through
  - o South and Mississippi River – Water levels were extremely high, been difficult hunting over water but success in fields. Reports have generally been positive with a lot of wood ducks and blue-winged teal around. Season has been fairly warm so dabblers are still around and diver numbers are starting to ramp up.
- Consensus from the group that this seemed pretty accurate, nothing really to add.

### **Update on Early Teal Season and Results**

- Taylor Finger provided background information on the teal season timing
- Description of the seasons accepted by WI, MI, and IA
  - o WI – 7 day season, 6 teal/day
    - Shooting hours for opening day were 9am – 7pm, Sept. 2-7 sunrise – 7pm
  - o MI – 7 day season, 6 teal/day, shooting hours sunrise to sunset
  - o IA – 16 day season, 6 teal/day, shooting hours sunrise to sunset
- Overview of the teal season and preliminary results
  - o A team of wildlife and LE staff was recruited and trained to observe hunters around the state.
  - o 31 hunting parties observed, 87% of the parties were in compliance; several groups shot at non-target species or didn't have licenses.
  - o Results show that fewer birds were observed and fewer hunters were out during the teal season likely because of the warm temperature.
  - o Reminded people that this was the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the 3 year process so the final analysis and report is currently underway.
  - o USFWS criteria for approval are based on pooled data from MI, WI and IA
- Taylor Finger provided an overview of teal harvest during the first 2 years of the early teal season in WI, MI and IA and how that compared to regular season harvest.

### **Comments –**

- **Don Kirby** – Would be interested to know why this 3 year experiment seems to have been so much better than the first early teal season conducted in the 1960's in MN when the

season was closed after one day because of so much non-target harvest. Response was that we really have no real idea why other than our increased level of educating the public.

- **John Wetzel** – Do we have any metric to tell how many hunters participate in the early teal season. Taylor Finger provided the response that the information we have on hunter participation and harvest comes from HIP federal data and they do not provide hunter participation on special early seasons.
- **Peter David** - noted that he received several complaints that early season waterfowl hunters (teal mostly) caused damage to some rice beds. There were no direct conflicts between ricers and hunters but the ricers thought that the hunters damaged the rice crop in some areas.

#### **Update on Mississippi River Fall Surveys**

- Taylor Finger provided a brief summary on what the surveys are and how they are conducted compared to the past. Brenda Kelly added additional information on specific aspects of survey design and what the hope is moving forward
- Taylor Finger provided background information on how the survey is currently being handled compared to how it was handled in the past due to conflict of interest with the Upper Mississippi River Refuge Staff. Discussions are ongoing on how to bring everyone back to the table regarding the survey.
- Taylor Finger showed the committee where we are housing these aerial survey summaries on our waterfowl surveys webpage and what the webpage looks like.
- Taylor Finger also provided a summary and look at a new feature to Wisconsin which is the Mallard Migration Map which asks area wildlife staff to rank mallard migration and provide those rankings to the Missouri Dept. of Conservation where they produce a migration map.

#### **Update Conservation Congress Resolutions and Legislative Issues**

- Taylor Finger presented information regarding a citizen resolution that suggests allowing a 16 day bonus teal option during the regular season in place of the early teal season. Citizens concern was too many non-target species are being harvested and this would help eliminate. The migratory committee of the conservation congress will be discussing this at their March meeting.
- Taylor Finger provided information on a citizen resolution that would establish a hunting moratorium on cranes of all species in Wisconsin to protect the fragile whooping crane population and habitat.
  - o Resolution came from Winnebago County where there was an error in how the votes were taken/counted and caused all citizen resolutions from Winnebago to be forwarded to their respective committees to be handled. The migratory committee will be discussing this at their March meeting.
- Taylor Finger provided information on a citizen resolution that would establish a training process to manage cowbirds. The resolution was taken up by the Environmental Committee of the Conservation Congress and was rejected after much discussion.

- Taylor Finger provided information on a citizen resolution requesting that the federal waterfowl baiting laws be changed to include disking passed vegetable crops. The resolution has been rejected in the passed by the migratory committee and this time was taken up by the legislative committee which rejected the resolution as well.
- Taylor Finger provided information on a citizen resolution which seeks to establish a Sandhill crane hunting season.
  - o provided background information on the process of establishing a season and what would need to happen
  - o provided background information on Sandhill crane populations and management plans
  - o provided background on the history of similar resolutions for establishing a Sandhill crane season.
  - o The resolution was take up by the legislative committee and was forwarded on.

#### **Comments –**

- **Al Shook** – Some people have proposed the idea of having a Sandhill crane season only located north of Hwy 64, the reason for this is that information shows that Whooping crane movement only occurs south of Hwy 64 and this may alleviate some concern over accidental harvest.

#### **Update on Canada Goose Management in Wisconsin and Flyway**

- Taylor Finger presented harvest data for early season and for exterior season for 2016
- Taylor Finger presented slide laying out how we have simplified and liberalized goose regulations over the past 10 years
- Taylor Finger presented map describing history on how we used to manage the different populations of Canada Geese and that WI has migrating geese that pass through the state from nesting areas in northern Ontario. Described the management of the increasing Local Temperate Breeding geese. Also informed committee of the percentages of what types of geese are shot in several states in the flyway and the flyway as a whole.
  - o Temperate Breeding Geese make up 70-80% of flyway harvest
  - o WI 40% temperate and 60% Ontario breeders (Regular season)
- Taylor Finger described the new management philosophy that the flyway seems to be heading in, toward less data collection and simplified management. Some states or provinces want to manage all Canada Geese as one and not have separate populations, reason for doing this is less cost to fly surveys and monitor Canada breeding geese. This may, however place too heavy a harvest on the Ontario breeding Canada geese with a negative impact to WI hunting opportunity.
- Taylor Finger presented population trend graphs indicating the Ontario nesting goose population is declining and WI and Miss. Flyway Giant goose population seems to be leveling out. He also presented graph showing how harvest would change if the daily bag limit increased to 3 birds/day and how that would impact the Ontario population.
- Taylor Finger provided information on the new survey technique used to monitor population levels in Ontario and how the new technique has impacted our ability to assess population levels.

- Taylor Finger provided information on how other states within the flyway view this issue and that all states other than WI and IL have accepted a 3 bird/day bag limit.

#### **Comments –**

- **Don Kirby** – Understand the biological advantages of having the goose call in system and paper tags but feels that with the transition to Go Wild that perhaps now is the time to change the way we collected harvest information. Can we possibly go to an online goose check card? Do we need to have a goose permit? Can we adjust for compliance?
- **Taylor Finger** – Those discussions are going to be taking place after we have gathered all the information at the end of the season. Then we will assess the effectiveness and need for the system going into the future.

#### **Update on Upcoming Flyway Issues**

- Taylor Finger provided information on the early teal season for 2017. Because states were required to set their 2017 seasons in August prior to the final year of the teal season occurring the USFWS allowed states to have an additional 4<sup>th</sup> year of the teal season while the states compile their final report. The 4<sup>th</sup> season will be under the same experimental parameters however, there will be no need for conducting observations.
- Appears that the 3 states will pass the experiment
- Goal is to conduct separate public meetings to discuss making the teal season operational in the future.
- Taylor Finger provided information on the USFWS allowing states to go to a 2 black duck/day bag limit due to reanalysis of population projections and impacts of harvest rate. At a flyway level there was some mixed feelings about whether or not states would choose to take the increase.

#### **Comments –**

- **Group** – Discussion on whether or not WI would want to take the increase to 2 black ducks/day due to concern over hen mallard populations. Appeared to be mixed feelings in the group as some would like to have the opportunity and would simplify the regulations where others expressed concern over confusion between hen mallards and the possible impact on harvest.